

Volunteer Legal Services Project of Monroe County, Inc. - (VLSP)

Contact Information

Website: <http://vlsprochester.org>
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Description of Organization

VLSP's mission is to improve the quality of life of low-income residents of Monroe County by ensuring the existence of a readily available panel of skilled volunteer attorneys to resolve serious legal problems. VLSP's pro bono opportunities include traditional case referrals as well as limited legal services at a variety of clinics and a consumer law hotline.

Volunteer Opportunities

Case Referrals - Includes Tax, Bankruptcy, Name Change, Immigration, Foreclosure Settlement Conferences, Unemployment Insurance Benefits Denials, Debt Collection, Habitat for Humanity Closings, Deed Transfers, Domestic Violence Divorce, Child Custody, Child Support, Grandparent/Non-parent Custody, Wills, Small Estate Administration, and Stand-by Guardianship matters.

Child Support - VLSP represents individuals seeking to establish child support or seeking to obtain, enforce, modify or defend a child support order.

Consumer Law Hotline - Volunteers interview clients experiencing issues with frozen bank accounts, wills, tax issues, deed transfers, probate, and name changes in order to assist VLSP in determining whether additional pro bono assistance is required. When appropriate, volunteers provide brief advice to clients to resolve their issue.

Consumer Problems - VLSP can assist with problems like name changes, income tax collection problems, unemployment insurance benefits denials, Habitat for Humanity real estate closings, "lemon" cars, and liens on bank accounts.

Debt Collection Advice Clinic - This clinic is divided into two sessions: The first clinic is the teaching session where a volunteer attorney gives general advice and presents information through a PowerPoint presentation prepared by VLSP. The attorney discusses debt problems including harassing phone calls from credit agencies, lawsuits to collect debts, and garnishment of wages. Approximately two weeks after the teaching session, there is an individual counseling session. Clients who meet certain eligibility criteria are invited back to meet individually with a volunteer attorney to discuss their debt situation in more detail. After the meeting, the attorney will make a recommendation concerning the client's suitability to file a Chapter 7 bankruptcy.

Divorce Cases - VLSP handles divorce cases for people who have been victims of recent, serious physical abuse or, on a more limited basis, those who have children and their physical residence is in dispute. VLSP also on a more limited basis handles cases involving arrears in child support or maintenance, QDROs, etc. VLSP also provides advice to individuals on

custody and related issues and helps people complete Family Court petitions for custody, visitation, or guardianship. VLSP also runs a "do-it-yourself" pro-se divorce class for people seeking a divorce who have no issues in dispute.

Record Expungement/Certificate of Release from Disability - VLSP can assist when legal problems prevent a person from getting or keeping employment. Examples include problems with LPN licenses, foster care licenses, criminal records, child abuse records, and driver's license lost because of unpaid judgment or child support. (VLSP cannot help if the license is suspended because of fines or penalties.)

Family Law Clinic - VLSP operates a clinic in which volunteer attorneys provide advice to individuals on custody and related issues and help people complete Family Court petitions for custody, visitation, or guardianship and also give instructions on filing those petitions with Family Court, if it is advisable to do so. Most clients who do file a petition do then get assigned counsel when they appear in Family Court.

Low Income Taxpayer Clinic - The Low Income Taxpayer Clinic (LITC) strives to educate Deaf and Hard of Hearing (D/HH) taxpayers about their rights and responsibilities and to resolve significant tax issues with the IRS. The LITC concentrates its outreach activities to D/HH individuals, human services agencies and organizations that serve D/HH individuals, and at community events. The LITC offers workshops on substantive tax information like EITC and IRS collections process. For D/HH individuals who may need legal representation to resolve their tax problems, VLSP will screen for eligibility based on income/assets and case merit.

Micro-Enterprise Program Clinic - The Micro-Entrepreneur Pro Bono Project (MPBP) provides pro bono (free) legal assistance to low-income individuals who wish to start or develop business in economically distressed neighborhoods. Through representation by transactional attorneys, MPBP provides pro bono legal assistance to entrepreneurs on issues including, but not limited to: Choice of Entity, Contracts, Licenses or Permits, Intellectual Property, Taxes, Insurances, Bonds, and other issues that may threaten the business, such as immigration, employment, and consumer. Once an application has been submitted, the applicant will be notified to schedule an intake meeting or informed that the business is not eligible. If the application is approved, MPBP will contact the law firm liaison who notifies the firm's volunteer attorneys. The law firm who accepts the client holds an initial meeting between the client and the attorney to discuss the client's particular legal issue. The law firm then handles the representation of the client for the specific issue identified in the application only.

Pro Se Divorce Clinic - Clients who are seeking an uncontested divorce are served by VLSP's Pro Se Divorce Clinic. An attorney teaches a series of three classes for clients to complete the many forms necessary to obtain a divorce. Volunteer attorneys and paralegals also assist clients in completing the forms and notarizing documents.

Tax Issues - VLSP handles many types of disputes with the IRS including, but not limited to, issues with earned income tax credit, dependency exemptions, head of household filing status, pension income, independent contractors, and other tax issues. VLSP can help with examinations or audits, collections, appeals and injured spouse tax relief.

Unemployment Insurance - VLSP represents claimants whose claims for unemployment insurance benefits have been turned down by the Department of Labor or challenged by the employer. VLSP handles these cases at the hearing level only.

[Wills Clinic](#) - The Wills Clinic assists clients with HIV/AIDS who want to prepare simple Wills, Health Care Proxies and Powers of Attorney. Many of VLSP's clients are single parents who want to prepare a will in order to name a guardian for their children in the event that their illness prevents them from raising their children to adulthood.

Areas of Substantive Law

Business Law

Health Law

Consumer Law

Tax Law

Employment Law

Unemployment Benefits

Family Law

General Notes

Capacity: VLSP can supervise and manage an unlimited number of volunteers.

Experience: Previous experience in substantive law is only required for the Micro-Enterprise Program Clinic.

Supervision: Volunteers will be supervised by a member of the VLSP staff, as well as by a member of the site that the volunteer is placed at, if applicable.